

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application.

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A method for managing returnable containers in a manufacturer's supply chain to facilitate allocation of containers to a plurality of suppliers in number adequate to meet a manufacturer's demand for parts from suppliers according to said manufacturer's production schedule comprising:
 - creating at least one container inventory holding area in said manufacturer's supply chain;
 - storing at said container inventory holding area a plurality of containers suitable for use by a plurality of suppliers in said manufacturer's supply chain;
 - determining a supplier on-hand container inventory quantity for each of said plurality of suppliers;
 - determining a container allocated days number for each of said plurality of suppliers, said container allocated days number for each supplier comprising a number of days a container remains in said supplier's on-hand container inventory to meet said manufacturer's demand for parts over a specified period of time, said container allocated days number determined by said manufacturer;
 - determining a parts demand value for each of said plurality of suppliers, said parts demand value for each supplier based on said manufacturer's actual requirement for parts from said supplier according to said manufacturer's production schedule, said parts demand value determined by said manufacturer;

calculating by said manufacturer a container allocation quantity for each of said plurality of suppliers, wherein said container allocation quantity for each supplier varies for each supplier according to based on said supplier's parts demand value as determined by said manufacturer's production schedule and said supplier's container allocated days number;

determining by said manufacturer for each of said plurality of suppliers an actual container quantity based on said container allocation quantity and said supplier on-hand container inventory quantity for each of said suppliers; and

shipping-releasing from said container inventory holding area to each of said plurality of suppliers a number of containers equal to said actual container quantity wherein said containers are released by said manufacturer according to said actual container quantity determined by said manufacturer.

2. (Canceled)
3. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 2 wherein determining for each of said plurality of suppliers a container allocated days number comprises determining a process flow of containers for each of said plurality of suppliers.
4. (Original) The method of claim 1 further comprising adjusting said actual container quantity for one of said plurality of suppliers based on a request from said supplier.
5. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein said supplier on-hand container inventory quantity comprises empty containers at said supplier's facility and full containers waiting to ship.
6. (Original) The method of claim 5 wherein said supplier on-hand inventory

container quantity further comprises empty containers in-transit to said supplier's facility and full containers in-transit to said manufacturer's facility.

7. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein said inventory holding area is of the type returnable container center.
8. (Currently Amended) A returnable container management system to facilitate allocation of containers to a plurality of suppliers in a number adequate to meet a manufacturer's demand for parts from suppliers according to said manufacturer's production schedule comprising:
 - a container inventory holding area;
 - a plurality of containers at said container inventory area, said containers suitable for use by a plurality of suppliers in said manufacturer's supply chain;
 - a supplier on-hand container inventory quantity determined by said manufacturer for each of said plurality of suppliers;
 - a container allocated days number determined by said manufacturer for each of said plurality of suppliers wherein said number for each supplier comprises a number of days a container remains in said supplier's on-hand container inventory;
 - a parts demand value for each of said plurality of suppliers wherein said value for each supplier is based on said manufacturer's actual requirement for parts from said supplier according to said manufacturer's production schedule;
 - a container allocation quantity determined by said manufacturer for each of said plurality of suppliers wherein said quantity for each supplier is ~~based on varies according to~~ said supplier's parts demand value and said supplier's container

allocated days number;

an actual container quantity determined by said manufacturer for each of said plurality of suppliers based on said supplier's container allocation quantity and said supplier's on-hand container inventory quantity; and

a means for releasing shipping from said container inventory holding area to each of said plurality of suppliers a number of containers equal to said actual container quantity wherein said manufacturer releases said containers.

9. (Canceled)
10. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 9 wherein determining for each of said plurality of suppliers a container allocated days number comprises determining a process flow of containers for each of said plurality of suppliers.
11. (Original) The system of claim 8 further comprising adjusting said actual container quantity for one of said plurality of suppliers based on a request from said supplier.
12. (Original) The system of claim 8 wherein said supplier on-hand container inventory quantity comprises empty containers at said supplier's facility and full containers waiting to ship.
13. (Original) The system of claim 12 wherein said supplier on-hand inventory container quantity further comprises empty containers in-transit to said supplier's facility and full containers in-transit to said manufacturer's facility.
14. (Original) The system of claim 8 wherein said inventory holding area is of the type returnable container center.
15. (Withdrawn) A method for managing returnable containers in a manufacturer's supply chain comprising:

identifying a plurality of inventory holding areas;
determining a plurality of container process flows wherein each container process flow represents a transfer of containers from a first one of said plurality of inventory holding areas to a second one of said plurality of inventory holding areas;

assigning at least one container type to each of said plurality of container process flows;

determining an allocation quantity of containers for each supplier in said manufacturer's supply chain, said allocation quantity determined according to said process flows;

determining a container inventory at each of said inventory holding areas; and

transferring said container inventory at each of said inventory holding areas according to said container process flows to provide to each of said suppliers a quantity of containers equal to said allocation quantity for said container type assigned to said container process flow.

16. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 15 wherein determining said allocation quantity of containers comprises:

determining for each of said plurality of suppliers a standard allocated days value;

determining for each of said plurality of suppliers a parts demand value; and

multiplying said standard allocated days value by said parts demand value

for each of said plurality of suppliers.

17. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 15 wherein said plurality of inventory holding areas is selected from the group of inventory holding area types consisting of supplier on-hand, supplier in-transit full, supplier in-transit empty, consolidation center, manufacturer's facility, and returnable container center.
18. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 17 wherein transferring said container inventory at each of said inventory holding areas comprises shipping said container inventory from a returnable container center inventory holding area to a supplier in-transit empty inventory holding area.
19. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 15 further comprising allocating a safety stock quantity of containers to each supplier.
20. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 15 further comprising modifying said allocation quantity of containers for each of said suppliers according to changes in said manufacturer's production schedule.